(c) if so, whether steps would be taken to utilize above fund for the welfare of NRKs;

(d) if so, the details thereof; and

(e) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF OVERSEAS INDIAN AFFAIRS (SHRI VAYALAR RAVI): (a) to (e) Prior to the introduction of the Pravasi Bharatiya Bima Yojana (PBBY) on 25.12.2003, emigrant workers recruited directly by the foreign employers were required to make a compulsory security deposit equivalent to one way return airfare while seeking emigration clearance. The purpose was to meet the cost of repatriation of the emigrant worker if required. The emigrant workers could claim the security on his/her return to India. As per information available in this Ministry an amount of around Rs. 28 crore is held as security deposit in the Government account and the refund of deposits are being made as and when claims are filed, from time to time. These funds will continue to be held as security deposit and refunded to the relevant workers upon claims filed.

Independent of this the Ministry has proposed creation of an Overseas Workers Welfare Fund for meeting various on site, off site and other welfare needs of the emigrants and the returnees.

Minimum wage to Indian workers

2725. SHRI T.T.V. DHINAKARAN: Will the Minister of OVERSEAS INDIAN AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is proposed to take up the matter with the Arabian and other Asian countries to provide a minimum wage to Indian worker;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF OVERSEAS INDIAN AFFAIRS (SHRI VAYALAR RAVI): (a) to (c) The Government has prescribed minimum wages only for women household service workers emigrating to the Emigration Check Required (ECR) countries. The minimum wage will be fixed by the Indian Missions concerned in the range of US $ 300-350 after taking into account the prevailing market wage in that country. It is intended to serve as a benchmark for the Indian Missions for attesting work contracts and for the Protectors of Emigrants before granting emigration clearance. This has been done for the women household service workers because they are not covered by the labour laws in the country of employment. As regards the monthly wage of other overeseas workers it is a matter between the employer and the worker as set out in the employment contract arrived at by mutual agreement based on market conditions. Therefore, the Government has not prescribed a minimum wage for other sectors.

Work visa for workers in Kuwait

2726. SHRI PR. RAJAN: Will the Minister of OVERSEAS INDIAN AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Kuwait has stopped issuing work visas for Indians at any time;

(b) if so, the steps Government has taken to protect NRIs in Kuwait; and

(c) the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF OVERSEAS INDIAN AFFAIRS (SHRI VAYALAR RAVI): (a) The Government of Kuwait had prescribed a format for the labour contract in respect of foreign workers. Applications for work visas without the labour contract in the prescribed format were not being considered. Under the bilateral MoU signed between India and Kuwait on Labour, Employment and Manpower Development attestation of the labour contract by the Government of Kuwait and the Indian Mission in Kuwait has been made a procedural requirement in the interest of the workers. The Joint Working Group comprising senior officers from both countries constituted under the MoU, has since met and agreed on a draft model Contract which is now in use for purposes of attestation and issuance of work visas.

(b) and (c) The following steps have been taken to protect the Indian emigrant workers abroad including in Kuwait:

Government has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the UAE and Kuwait and an Additional Protocol with Qatar, and is in an advanced stage of signing similar MoUs with Malaysia and Bahrain for the protection and welfare of Indian workers in the gulf countries and Malaysia. A national awareness campaign has been launched in the vernacular electronic and print media to educate potential emigrants about the risks of illegal migration The Government is also considering setting up of a Welfare Fund for Overseas Indian workers and a Council for Promotion of Overseas Employment. The Emigration Act, 1983 is being suitably amended to protect the emigrant workers from unscruplous recruiting agents and intermediaries. Government has already initiated Orientation-cum-Training Scheme for skill up-gradation of potential overseas Indian workers to match the International Labour Market demand. Government has also set up an Overseas Workers Resource Centre (OWRC) including a helpline to provide all relevant information and assistance to potential migrant workers.

Indian returning from abroad

2727. SHRI B.K. HARIPRASAD: Will the Minister of OVERSEAS INDIAN AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government has assessed the extent of social and economic fall-out arising from the return of many Indians from the Gulf countries under the recently concluded amnesty scheme;

(b) whether Government of Malaysia has declared that about 2 lakh foreign workers may be sent back home by the end of 2009 of which many would be from India; and

(c) the contingency plans Government has in place to absorb such a large number of Indian workers returning from abroad?

THE MINISTER OF OVERSEAS INDIAN AFFAIRS (SHRI VAYALAR RAVI): (a) There "are an estimated 4.5 million Overseas Indian workers in the gulf. Relative to this large number, there are instances of small numbers of illegal workers who are from time to time deported under amnesty schemes of the host Governments. When such amnesty schemes are announced, efforts are made by the Indian Missions concerned to regularize the stay, residence and employment of such workers. In cases where it is not possible to do so, some workers are deported though issuance of emergency certificates. The Mission renders the necessary assistance for the return of such workers. As a policy, the Government of India discourages illegal migration and has taken several steps to curb the same. These include a national